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WASHINGTON, DC-U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon today announced grants of \$300,000 for the Children's Coalition for the Bayou Region and \$224,892 for the St. Mary Community Action Agency. Both grants are funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

**"Raising a family in Louisiana taught me a great deal about the care and support that children need in order to grow and thrive," said Melancon. "Being good parents and knowing how to nurture children are vital skills for parents to learn. I am grateful for the work of the Children's Coalition and St. Mary Community Action Agency to strengthen families and help our children succeed."**

St. Mary Community Action Agency, in Franklin, has provided services to economically underprivileged residents in St. Mary Parish since 1967. The Agency works to reduce poverty through strategic planning and implementation of projects and services that strengthen, renew, and guide low-income families into self-sufficiency.

The Agency will use the HHS grant to expand its Promoting Responsible Fatherhood initiative into rural communities. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem, exhibit empathy and pro-social behavior compared to children who have uninvolved fathers.

Almetra Franklin, CEO of the Community Action Agency, said, "This was a highly competitive grant, and we're very excited to be one of only two programs in Louisiana to receive this funding to get fathers more involved in the lives of their children." The Agency's goal is to reach 120 fathers in the parish, age 16 and over. Workshops, seminars, peer support and counseling will promote healthy parenting skills and encourage better involvement with their children.

The Children's Coalition for the Bayou Region serves families and children in the parishes of Terrebonne, Lafourche and Assumption. The Coalition brings together over 120 community

agencies and organizations, serving more than 200,000 people. The purpose is to enable them to exchange ideas, identify gaps in services and find ways to partner in order to bring needed programs to children and families. The Coalition also advocates for the rights of children and families, bringing the Bayou Region into the state spotlight.

The HHS grant will enable the Coalition, along with six partner community organizations, to become certified by the Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations (LANO). The two-year certification process develops standards of excellence for the procedures, policies and operations of the community organizations.

Leilani Brunet, Interim Executive Director of the Children's Coalition, emphasized how much this certification will help the Coalition: "It can be overwhelming, as a small nonprofit organization, so having LANO lead and guide us in creating the infrastructure for our organization will help us to grow and be more credible for future funding."

Brunet hopes one day the Coalition will be able to open a children's services center with a variety of social services in one place. "Right now these services are spread all over the area," she said. "Many children don't have access to them because their families don't have adequate transportation."

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